

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: The Purpose of Education in an Era of High-Stakes Testing

STUDENT: Steven L. Goeglein

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This study sought to determine the beliefs of curriculum directors within the public school districts of Indiana with regard to the purpose of education and to the impact of high-stakes testing. The six cultures of curriculum described by Joseph et al. (2000) were utilized to provide the lens through which curriculum directors could view the overall curriculum of their individual districts. For the purpose of this study, the curriculum director was defined as the person at the district level most responsible for the organization and implementation of the curriculum. The researcher first sought to determine the culture supported personally by curriculum directors and the culture believed to be most prevalent within their districts. In relation, the researcher further wished to learn if directors believed high-stakes testing served a valid purpose within the context of their personally supported culture or the one perceived to be most prevalent. Finally, the researcher sought to determine if directors believed the pressure to perform well on high-stakes tests had an influence upon their decision-making in relation to curricular changes.

Data from 136 (46.6%) of Indiana's 292 public school districts showed *Constructing Understanding*, defined as "Developing in students the ability to think independently and to build knowledge from the information they gather through observation and collaboration" (Appendix E), was selected by 64.4% of the respondents as the curriculum culture most in agreement with their personal beliefs. When asked to identify the curriculum culture perceived to be most prevalent within their school districts, *Training for Work and Survival*, defined as "Providing students the necessary skills to allow them to be both effective and adaptive in the workplace and in society" (Appendix E), was selected by 66.9% of respondents. With respect to perceived pressure related to high-stakes testing, 73.5% indicated the pressure *significantly impacts* or *has the greatest impact on my decision-making*; 73.7% felt *significant to extreme pressure* for their students to perform well on ISTEP+ and the ECAs; and, 63.6% reported feeling *moderate to extreme pressure* to encourage teachers to teach to the test.